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ABSTRACT

National Assessment, a systematic survey of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, provides educators and the public with information on student achievement. The data-gathering model for the Assessment has yielded differences of various groups' performances in the area of political knowledge. These results seem to imply that the academic approach to the teaching of political knowledge is advantageous only to those with strong academic traditions and achievement motivation. Consequently, the existing goals of civics, the course in the social studies curriculum responsible for promoting political knowledge, seem to be less than successful. When the traditional concept of the "good citizen" is revised to that of the "evolving individual," new social studies goals arise compatible to the need for a more favorable socialization of children and for civics courses responsive to all groups of students. A school environment oriented to the changes called for by the implications drawn from the Assessment encompasses the following: the fostering of total student development; creation of a self-actualizing situation for teachers; use of informal learning environments; study of actual political models such as the school; advancement of students toward affective, as well as cognitive, goals; and the opportunity for critical thinking and conflict resolution experiences. (Author/KSM)

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# SOME IMPLICATIONS OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

by

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# SOME IMPLICATIONS OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

National Assessment discovered differences in the performances of youth with respect to knowledge about citizenship according to their backgrounds. Students from educationally advantaged homes and affluent communities achieved substantially more than respondents from less advantaged settings. Furthermore, sizeable numbers of Americans expressed reservations about such things as freedom of the press and freedom of religion. Are these findings important? How were they determined?

As you probably know, National Assessment is a plan for the systematic, census-like survey of knowledges, skills, understandings, and attitudes. It is an information gathering plan aimed at providing both educators and the lay public with information concerning the level of achievement in selected subject areas for students and young adults. The goal is to provide information that will be used to improve education.

## The Data-Gathering Model

The basic components of the National Assessment, data-gathering model are presented in Diagram I. A circular scheme is used in presenting it here, since, in reality, the actual application may be initiated with any one of the components. Also, in its application, there are continual interactions between and among the various components. While theoretically the process starts with the refinement of overall goals into specific, subject matter, behavioral objectives, and progresses in logical sequence through to the final component, Utilization of the Information, in practice there is much greater freedom with respect to the utilization of the components.

While the model is in the continuous process of being refined and improved, the seven basic components identified in Diagram I remain unchanged. Here is a brief summary of the components of the model as they were applied in the Citizenship Assessment.

I. Objective Development. Previous lists of citizenship objectives were initially assembled into a preliminary list. This list was reviewed by several different panels including academic scholars, public school people and lay citizens before a final list of objectives was accepted.

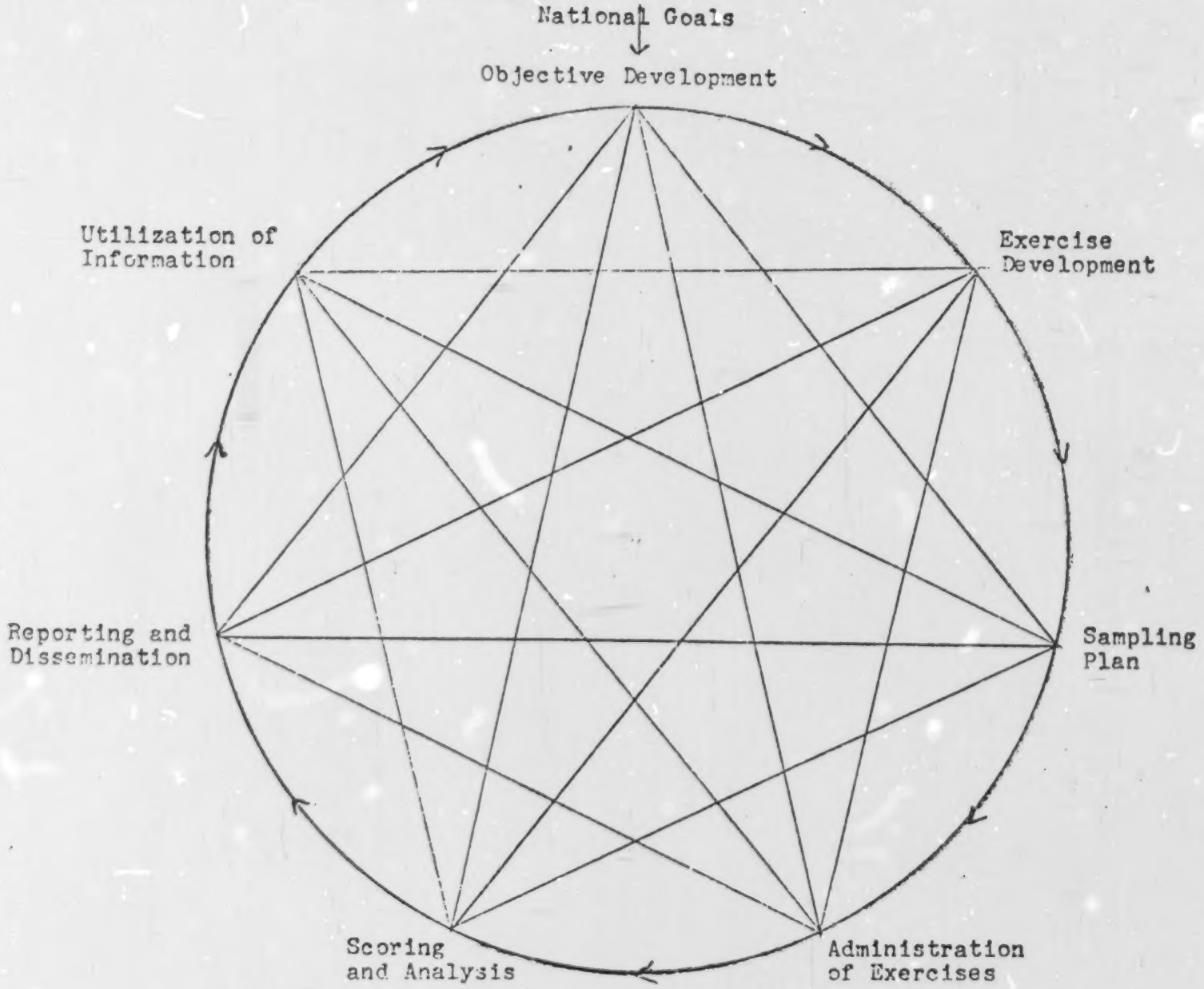
II. Exercises Development. Exercises were developed to cover all the objectives and to represent all the content areas involved. They went beyond the usual paper and pencil approaches by using interview techniques, as well as group-task exercises in some cases. Again the exercises were reviewed by several panels including scholars, public school people, and laymen. Tryouts were conducted with the selected exercises under actual assessment conditions.

III. Sampling Plan. A multi-stage sampling plan which was stratified by region, size of community, and socio-economic status was used. This probably is one of the most carefully designed sampling plans ever put into practice on such a large scale.

IV. Scoring and Analysis. For the open-ended exercises, especially trained professionals were used to do the scoring. In analyzing the data, a statistical procedure, balancing, was used to correct for a lack of proportionality among characteristics used in the comparison of groups.

V. Administration of Exercises. A full-time trained staff managed the field administration of the exercises. The exercises were organized in packages in such a fashion that no one person took only exercises in his age group. In packages administered to

DIAGRAM I. COMPONENTS OF THE MODEL



groups, taped directions and taped readings of the exercises were used. This was done to assure consistency in timing and administration, plus to provide for non-readers. Some of the packages consisted of exercises that were given to one individual at a time. All the adult assessment was done by interviews.

VI. Reporting and Dissemination. The reporting of the results was directed to different audiences such as subject matter specialists, professional educators, and informed laymen. Less than half of the exercises were reported since they were to be used over again so as to measure change. The reporting was done by age group, region, community types, sex, socio-economic status, and white-nonwhite groups. The results were given in percentages without any interpretation.

VII. Utilization of Information. The results provide information for education decision making, and the results of several cycles should provide evidence of change in knowledges, skills, understandings, and attitudes of American youth.

Group Differences on Political Knowledge

When the above briefly described, data-gathering model was applied to the collection of information about knowledges, skills, understandings, and attitudes of 9 year olds, 13 year olds, 17 year olds, and young adults in our population with respect to the areas of citizenship and social studies, a number of not unexpected yet very important findings came to light. While it is not possible to compare these results with any established national norms, it certainly is possible to compare them with personal expectations concerning the political knowledge of these groups in the American population.

When comparisons were made by subpopulations, it was found that there were marked differences in their achievement with regard to political knowledge. The following groups performed the lowest in comparison to the national performance levels.[1]

1. Respondents from the Southeast performed below the national levels for 9, 13, 17, and young adult age levels.
2. Males performed more poorly than females at ages 9 and 13, but for ages 17 and young adults females performed more poorly than males.
3. Blacks performed consistently below the national level.
4. Respondents whose parents had no high school education performed well below national levels.
5. Respondents from low socio-economic groups in large metropolitan areas performed well below all other groups from different type and size of communities.

The groups which performed the highest in comparison to national performance levels were these.

1. Respondents from the Northeast performed generally above the national performance levels, but the performance level for 17 age group came closer to the national level.
2. Female respondents tended to perform better than males at ages 9 and 13, but the pattern reversed for 17 year olds and young adults.
3. Whites performed consistently above the national average.
4. At all ages, respondents with at least one parent having more than a high school education performed above the national levels.
5. High socio-economic groups in metropolitan areas performed well above the national average at all ages.

These findings of National Assessment for the results of Citizenship and Social Studies Assessments are certainly not surprising from the perspective of an informed educator. In fact,

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[1]Marriner, Gerald L. and Robert Crane, Political Knowledge and Attitudes, National Assessment of Education Progress, Education Commission of the States, Denver, December, 1973, pp. 49-60.

based on knowledge of other studies, the results are very much what might be expected. Nevertheless, there is a need to examine the implications of these results. Those respondents with the strongest academic tradition and greatest motivation for academic achievement did the best on these exercises. This probably reflects the academic approach to the teaching of political knowledge in our schools. Note that males became better informed as they became older and probably more interested in politics. On the other hand, females fell behind in this kind of information as they became older. Evidently, as the information became less academic and more real it was of less interest to females as they moved into their adult roles. Two groups, black and low socio-economic respondents from large metropolitan areas, did not do well. While these groups need political knowledge to improve their circumstances, their poor showing probably can be assigned to such causes as poor motivation, the academic approach to political knowledge taken in the schools, and possibly poor teaching.

Political and social leaders in the country find the assessment results very disturbing, for they believe that the schools are failing to educate the young adequately in this respect.[2] Also, they believe that the schools are taking too academic an approach. Things like lobbying, special interest groups, and leverage points in the political system are what citizens need to know, and schools are not teaching these in a realistic manner. Students do not seem to gain from their education a real understanding of how the political system works.

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[2]"Instruction in Fundamentals of Politics Lacking: Bailey," NAEP Newsletter VII, 1-2, January-February, 1974, Education Commission of the States, National Assessment of Educational Progress, Denver.

On the other hand, scholars have pointed to certain problems in the assessment instruments which might explain in part the poor performance of some of these groups. An investigation by Chapin[3] of the social studies assessment exercises indicated they stressed knowledge as opposed to valuing or social participation. Taylor,[4] in another paper, has cited the extensive screening through which all of the exercises used in the assessments must pass. Perhaps a great deal of what is really important to many groups has been screened out as sensitive materials or unimportant by the academic and lay panels which did the screening. The panel members selected for this task did not include such people as blacks from the core city or dirt farmers from Appalachia. National Assessment has great political overtones, and through the extensive procedures for avoiding political conflicts, much of the reality of such an assessment may have been screened out of the instruments.

The Place of Civics in the Curriculum

Civics has been the course in the social studies curriculum responsible for promoting political knowledge. In the past, civic education has been poorly conceptualized, and at the secondary school level it has attempted to: (1) bring the students a body of knowledge about the political system, (2) improve on the interpersonal skills of students, and (3) inculcate in the students certain normative political values. Certainly, regardless of whatever limitations the assessment instruments may have, there is a strong indication that the existing curriculum has failed with certain groups in this country to do the job with respect to their political knowledge.

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[3]Chapin, June R., "Social Studies Educators Rate the NAEP Social Studies Exercises," mimeo, 16 pp.

[4]Taylor, Bob L., "The National Assessment Model," mimeo, 14 pp.

In order to survive, all societies transmit political orientations from one generation to the next. Coleman[5] has defined political socialization as "that process by which individuals acquire attitudes and feelings toward the political system and toward their role in it." This educational process involves all institutions in the society so the school is only one agency, but it has been hypothesized that the school is the most powerful institution in the socialization of the individual about the political system.[6]

There are those who hold that the school is an agent for maintaining sociopolitical orthodoxy and enforcing mass conformity.[7] The present school environment tends to emphasize authority and conformity. If we agree that the concomitant environment of the school is its most prevailing influence and that formal civic courses are not positively correlated with political beliefs, the task of the school would be: (1) to reshape the school environment into one which has the capacity for contributing favorably to the socialization of children, and (2) to replace the present superficial and frequently irrelevant civic education courses with ones that are responsive to the needs of students of today.

Curriculum Change

The implications of the National Assessment results are that the school curriculum is not doing the job for many Americans. This is not new information, but with the kind of support National Assessment findings provide it must be taken more seriously. What changes

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[5]Coleman, James S., "Introduction," Education and Political Development, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 18.

[6]Hess, Robert D. and Judith V. Torney, The Development of Basic Attitudes and Values Toward Government and Citizenship During Elementary School Years, Part I, Chicago, University of Chicago Cooperation Research Project No. 1078, 1965, p. 137.

[7]Ibid., p. 377.

should be made in the curriculum to meet the needs of those who are not gaining the understandings of our political system which they now need.

The traditional concept of the "good citizen" is not adequate as we move toward the year 2000. Furthermore, some very negative implications have come to be attached to the term, "good citizen," as it has been used in our society. Toffler[8] maintained that the schools must develop in youth the skills for learning, relating, and choosing. This implies that education is more than either socialization or the development of rationality. There are emotional and value components which must be included in the education of youth. The citizen of the future must carry out the comprehensive act of thinking, feeling, valuing, and doing. This is broader than the old term, "good citizen," and it implies the importance of on-going change. In a recent publication of ASCD, a new term was coined, "evolving individual," as the primary concern of the social studies.[9] Here, the real self is to be uncovered and actualized and thus self-definition, clarification of identity, and response to one's inner self are fostered. In order to achieve a sincere involvement in one's society, the student must find and know his intimate self. In the process of getting to know himself better and of becoming a more knowledgeable and responsible person, the student must confront the current problems of both an individual and social nature. This is suggested as the primary methodological strategy for the social studies.

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[8]Toffler, Alvin, Future Shock, New York, Bantam Books, Inc., 1970, p. 414.

[9]Hunkins, Francis P. and Patricia F. Spears, Social Studies for the Evolving Individual, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Washington, D. C., 1973, 65 pp.

Purposes of the Social Studies

If the goal of the social studies is the social education of the evolving individual, then certain basic purposes must be included in social studies programs. These are:

1. Socialization which is aimed at assisting the evolving individual to become an effective member of social groups.

2. Decision making which is aimed at assisting the evolving individual to make effective use of his intellectual skills in reaching decisions about his social concerns.

3. Values and valuing which are aimed at aiding the evolving individual to identify, examine, formulate, and evaluate his own values and to act in accord with his considered values.

4. Citizenship which is aimed at helping the evolving individual to use more effectively the processes of a representative-democratic government.

5. Knowledge acquisition which is aimed at helping the evolving individual to acquire and utilize information and intellectual skills provided through the social sciences together with other organized disciplines in dealing with social concerns.[10]

Implications for Change

If we are to reverse the negative impact of civics courses on the political socialization of many youth, we are going to have to do more than instruct them in the methodologies of the political sciences. Our new program must be reality oriented in the following ways:

1. We must advance the student toward affective goals, as well as cognitive objectives. Schools operate as if the student's access to knowledge is through formal and informal experiences at school. Today, students come to school with a great range of experiences so that at times they are better informed and more experienced than those who are teaching them.

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[10] Ibid., p. 4.

2. We must reshape the school environment into one where the total development of the student is fostered. Schools need to experiment with learning environments which place more responsibility for learning on the student. Frequently, social studies teachers have not utilized the human resources within the classroom and have not used the diverse cultural perspectives which ethnic-group students have brought to the learning situation. Ignoring the real resources available within the learning situation, we have presented social and political models which were inappropriate and counter-productive for some of our students.

3. We must use learning environments outside the formal classroom. Instruction in civic education should build on the life models learned by the students in their unstructured experiences. The teacher's task is to use the resources of the classroom to aid students in refining and improving their life models so as to broaden and deepen their understanding of them.

4. We must use the political and social system of the schools as a model for study. Usually the student is well aware of the factors in this model and has an understanding of it. Not only are we to be concerned with what the student knows, but what he values and how this is related to what he knows. The school should be concerned with both knowledge and values.

5. We must provide the student with the opportunities and tools for thinking reflectively about his beliefs. He needs to critically examine traditional practices within an atmosphere conducive to reflective thinking. We must provide the student with the opportunities for testing cognitive and affective models of the political world. He needs data about how individuals participate in politics; how information is communicated; how decisions are made; how leadership

is exercised; how conflicts are managed; how prejudices are institutionalized.

6. We must provide the student with experiences in dealing with conflict. Activism is a part of our social scene, and the social studies curriculum must deal realistically with effective decision making in a pluralistic society. Conflict, compromise, and consensus are all important elements to be included. Because of this, the social studies teacher must have a new freedom in which to teach. Instruction cannot be limited in its alternatives by tradition and the "system." Both students and teachers must have the freedom to consider new and novel approaches to the solutions of problems.

7. We need a teaching situation in which the teacher can be self-actualizing. The bureaucratic structure within which the usual teacher works discourages innovative behavior, for our hierarchial reward system promotes ineffectiveness and docility. The "system" rewards compromising behavior which threatens the teacher's personal integrity.[11]

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[11] Ibid., pp. 17-23.